

The Islamic Response to the Problem of Evil & Suffering

A Summary

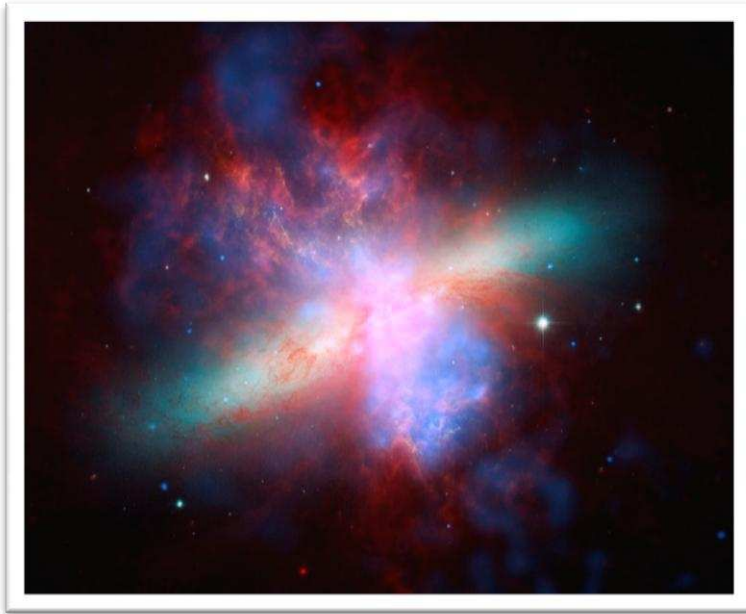
It is unbelievable that a *Good All-Powerful* (omnipotent) being exists with all the evil and suffering in the world.

Western Philosophy

- David Hume, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*:
 - “Epicurus’s old questions are yet unanswered. Is He willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is impotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”

David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion: The Posthumous Essays on the Immortality of The Soul and Suicide. Edited by Richard Popkin. Hackett Publishing. 1980, p. 63.

If you reject God due to the existence of evil, you'll have to accept God due to design.



Why?

The Problem of Evil & Suffering

- 1. A Good Omnipotent God Exists.**
- 2. Evil Exists and Suffering Exists.**
- 3. Therefore, a Good Omnipotent God Doesn't Exist.**

Three Daring Assumptions:

1. That God is *just* Good and Omnipotent.
2. That God doesn't have good *reasons* to permit evil.
3. Evil is objective.

Is God *just* Good and Omnipotent?

Is God *just* Good and Omnipotent?

Misrepresentation of the Islamic conception of God

- Many Names and Attributes such as *The Wise, The Knowing*.
- If God is The Wise, there is wisdom behind the perceived evil.
- Wisdom = reasons.

What Wisdom?

Argument from Ignorance:

- *Argumentum ad ignoratium.*
- Just because the wisdom cannot be seen or understood it doesn't mean there is no wisdom.
- Qur'an 18: 65 – 82 and 2: 30.

Moses and Khidr

Qur'an 18: 65 - 82

- Listen to the story...



Lesson #1: Foreknowledge

- Khidr was the one whom Allah had given knowledge that He had not given to Musa.
- **“Verily, you will not be able to have patience with me!”:**

meaning, “You will not be able to accompany with me when you see me doing things that go against your law, because *I have knowledge from Allah* that **He has not taught you**, and you have knowledge from Allah that He has not taught me.”

Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim, Ibn Kathir

Lesson #2: Wisdom/Reasons

- He was given Divine wisdom and the totality of knowledge, not its particulars.
- **“And how can you have patience about a thing which you know not”:**

meaning, “For I know that you will denounce me justifiably, but **I have knowledge of Allah’s wisdom and the hidden interests** which I can see but you cannot.”

Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim, Ibn Kathir

God Knows and We Don't

‘And when your Lord said to the angels, “Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.” They said, “Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?” Allah said, “Indeed, I know that which you do not know.”’ *Qur'an 2: 30*

Lesson #1: Foreknowledge

- “I know that which you do not know”:
meaning, “I know that the benefit of creating this type of creature **outweighs the harm that you mentioned**, that which you have no knowledge of.”

Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim, Ibn Kathir

Lesson #2: Wisdom/Reasons

- “I know that which you do not know”:

meaning, “I will create among them Prophets and send Messengers. I will also create among them truthful, martyrs, righteous believers, worshippers, the modest, the pious, the scholars who implement their knowledge, humble people and those who love Allah and follow His Messengers.”

Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim, Ibn Kathir

Profound Wise Purpose

- “We made good everything He created.” Q 32:7
- Ibn Taymiyya writes:
 - “If God – exalted is He – is Creator of everything, He creates good (*khayr*) and evil (*sharr*) on account of the wise purpose that He has in that by virtue of which His action is good (*hasan*) and perfect (*mutqin*)...God is Creator of illnesses, aches, hateful odours, ugly forms and noxious bodies like snakes and human excrement on account of a **profound wise purpose in them.**”

Minhaj As-Sunnah 3:142/2:25

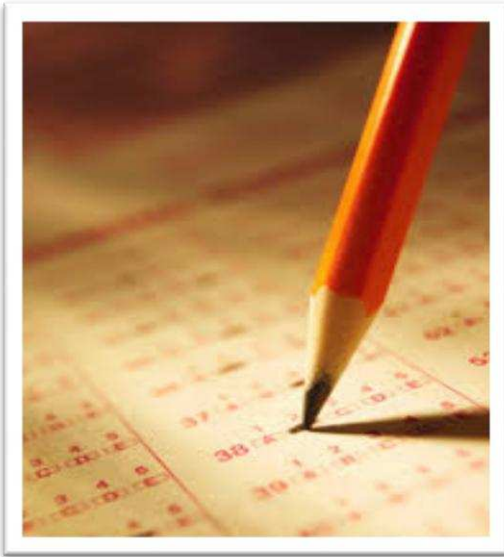
God Does Not Create Pure Evil

- “God does not create pure evil. Rather, in everything that He creates is a wise purpose by virtue of what is good. **However, there may be some evil in it for some people, and this is partial, relative evil.** As for total evil or absolute evil, the Lord is exonerated of that.”

Ibn Taymiyya. Hasana, MF 14:266

**Does God give us good
reasons to permit evil?**

Life is a test



“He who created death and life to test you as to which of you is best in deed - and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving.” Qur’an 67: 2

Our Purpose

**“And I did not create
the jinn and mankind
except to worship
Me.” Qur’an 51: 56**



Knowing God



Al-Wali

**The Governor,
The Protector**

2nd Order Good



1st order good is physical pleasure and happiness and 1st order evil is physical pain and sadness. 2nd order goodness is elevated goodness such as courage, and it can only happen if suffering or evil exist.

Free Will



God has given us free will, and free will includes choosing evil acts. Without free will “good” and “evil” are meaningless. This explains personal evil.

Future Sins

People can also suffer from past, present or future sins. God has knowledge of everything which is not contingent on time.



Objective Evil Necessitates God's Existence

Remember...

“Know God, Know Good?”

How can the atheist formulate an argument against the existence of God when God is required as an objective basis for the formulation of the argument in the first place?!

The Emotional/ Spiritual Argument



Purifying Hearts

“So that Allah might test what is in your breasts and purify what is in your hearts.

And Allah is

**Knowing of that
within the breasts”**

Qur'an 3:154



Relief & Paradise

**“Surely with every difficulty there is relief.
Surely with every difficulty there is relief.”**

Qur'an 94: 5-6

**“Anyone who dies of the plague is a martyr.
Anyone who dies of a stomach illness is a
martyr. Anyone who drowns is a martyr.”**

Sahih Muslim

Its All Good

“Amazing is the affair of the believer, verily all of his affair is good and this is not for no one except the believer. If something of good/happiness befalls him he is grateful and that is good for him. If something of harm befalls him he is patient and that is good for him.”

Sahih Muslim

Expiation of Sins

“No calamity befalls a Muslim but that Allah expiates some of his sins because of it, even though it were the prick he receives from a thorn.”

Bukhari

Entering Paradise

“Do you think that you will enter paradise without any trials while you have known the examples of those who passed away before you? They were afflicted with suffering and adversity and were so violently shaken up that even the Prophet and the believers with him cried out: ‘When will God’s help come?’ Be aware, God’s help is close.” *Qur’an 2:214*****

The Bad \neq Good

Say Prophet, “Bad cannot be likened to good, though you may be dazzled by how abundant the bad is. Be mindful of God, people of understanding, so that you may prosper.” ***Qur'an 5:100***

To Confirm God's Revelation

“Each time the servant increases in knowledge and faith, some of **God's wisdom and His mercy will appear to him that will dazzle his intellect.** This will make evident to him to count as true that about which God has informed in His book, ‘We will show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves until it becomes evident to them that He is the Real’ Q 41:53.”

Ibn Taymiyya. Irada, MF 8:97

God's Wise Purposes

- Henri Laoust in his *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taki-d-Din Ahmad b. Taimiya*:
 - “God is essentially providence. Evil is without real existence in the world. **All that God has willed can only conform to a sovereign justice and an infinite goodness**, provided, however, that it is envisaged from the point of view of the totality and not from that of the fragmentary and imperfect knowledge that His creatures have of reality...”

Cited in Jon Hoover. Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism. Brill. 2007, p.4.

Evil is Not Attributed to God

- “Hence, evil is not attributed to God in any respect. Even if God is the Creator of the servant’ acts – His creation of obedient acts is blessing and mercy, and **He has a wise purpose and mercy in His creation of evil deeds** – this is nonetheless just of Him.”

Ibn Taymiyya. Hasana.

Evil is Not Directly Attributed

- “Guide us to the straight path: the path of those You have blessed, those who incur no anger and who have not gone astray.” ***Qur'an 1: 6-7***
 - The verb ‘anger’ here is not attributed to God. There is a “linguistic” *adab* in the Qur'an that doesn't directly attribute “evil” to God.
- Remember the story of Musa and *Khidr*? *Khidr* attributed the perceived wrong to himself and the wisdom behind his actions to God.